

NGATAURUA ISLETS, MIMIWHANGATAA.E. Wright

During an Offshore Island Research Group scientific trip to Rimariki Island off Mimiwhangata Farm Park (see map for location) the opportunity was taken to land on a number of small vegetated islets in the surrounding area. In this note, vegetation descriptions and a species list of the vascular plants are provided for four of these islets lying just off Ngataurua Point.

Mimiwhangata Station and Rimariki Island were purchased by Lion Breweries in 1962 and are now controlled by a Trust Board. In 1978, negotiations were begun with the Hauraki Gulf Maritime Park Board (who manage the Poor Knights Islands off the coast of Mimiwhangata) and a Joint Management Committee was formed to administer the coastal areas of the farm. It is the aim of this Committee to preserve the area for all New Zealanders in the interests of history, education, science and recreation. One facet of this is a proposal for a marine reserve in the coastal waters surrounding Mimiwhangata. The reserve is not intended to provide total preservation nor to remove access from the marine environment; activities such as recreational fishing and diving will still be allowed.

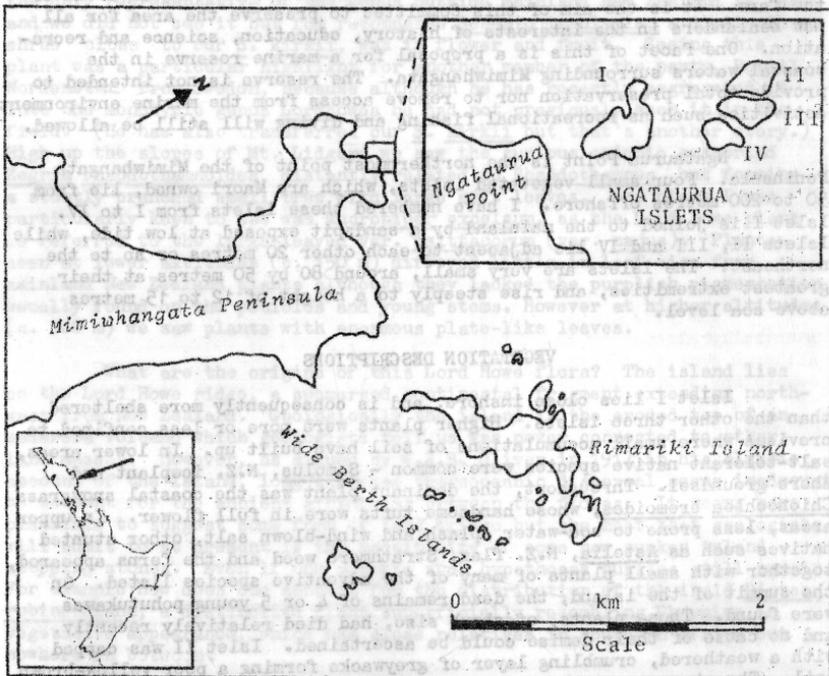
Ngataurua Point is the northernmost point of the Mimiwhangata Peninsula. Four small vegetated islets, which are Maori owned, lie from 50 to 200 metres offshore. I have numbered these islets from I to IV. Islet I is joined to the mainland by a sandspit exposed at low tide, while Islets II, III and IV lie adjacent to each other 20 metres or so to the northeast. The islets are very small, around 80 by 50 metres at their greatest extremities, and rise steeply to a height of 12 to 15 metres above sea level.

VEGETATION DESCRIPTIONS

Islet I lies close inshore, and is consequently more sheltered than the other three islets. Higher plants were more or less confined to crevices where small accumulations of soil have built up. In lower areas, salt-tolerant native species were common - Samolus, N.Z. iceplant and shore groundsel. Throughout, the dominant plant was the coastal snowgrass Chionochloa bromoides, whose handsome tufts were in full flower. In upper areas, less prone to sea-water splash and wind-blown salt, other stunted natives such as Astelia, N.Z. flax, Strathmore weed and the ferns appeared, together with small plants of many of the adventive species listed. On the summit of the island, the dead remains of 4 or 5 young pohutukawas were found. These plants, of shrub size, had died relatively recently, and no cause of their demise could be ascertained. Islet II was capped with a weathered, crumbling layer of greywacke forming a poor yellow-brown soil. The steeper, northern face supported little vegetation, with a good cover of Chionochloa on the gentler southern slope. Once again, a number of shrub-sized pohutukawas were found apparently dead on the summit of the islet. On closer inspection, these were found to be sprouting again from near the base of the stems. It is a curious fact that the pohutukawas should be so severely knocked back on these two islets while continuing to flourish on the other two.

Islet III, the middle of the three outer islets, was very steep-sided and difficult of access, particularly in the swell prevailing at the time of my visit. Thus no landing was made, although a good view could be had from Islets II and IV from which it is separated by only a few metres of water. The steep sides are capped by a weathered greywacke soil. On

this flattened cap was a continuous shrubbery of 1 to 2 metre high pohutukawa, N.Z. flax, taupata, mingimingi and coastal karamu. On the south-eastern side (facing Islet II) the summit vegetation extended further down, with flowering renga lily, numerous young karo, Astelia, wild oats and Poa anceps prominent. On the steep lower faces, Chionochoa was abundant, along with N.Z. iceplant and shore groundsel in the crevices. It is likely that the shelter provided by the adjacent islets together with the relatively flat summit area has led to the development of a more mature and continuous vegetation cover. Closer inspection would reveal most of the small herbs listed for the other islets, thus giving Islet III the largest flora in the group.



In contrast, Islet IV supported mainly crevice vegetation, with a low, spreading pohutukawa shrubbery on the highest point. A few small clumps of ferns were establishing themselves around the pohutukawa. Annual weeds were common in the small talus accumulations in crevices in upper areas. As on many of these small vegetated islets around Mimiwhangata, black-backed gulls were found nesting; they wasted no time in showing their disapproval of my invasion of their privacy!

SPECIES LIST

A flora of 40 species of vascular plants is recorded for the Ngataurua Islets. Of these, 15 species denoted by an asterisk are adventives. As Islet III was not actually landed on, only those species visible from the adjacent islets were recorded.

FERNS		I	II	III	IV
<i>Asplenium flaccidum</i> subsp. <i>haurakiense</i>		+	-	-	+
<i>Phymatodes diversifolium</i>		-	-	-	+
<i>Pyrrosia serpens</i>		+	-	-	-
MONOCOTS					
<i>Arthropodium cirratum</i>	renga lily	-	-	+	-
<i>Astelia banksii</i>		+	-	+	-
<i>Avena fatua</i> *	wild oat	-	-	+	-
<i>Bromus mollis</i> *		-	-	-	+
<i>Carex breviculmis</i>		+	-	-	-
<i>Chionochloa bromoides</i>	coastal snowgrass	+	+	+	+
<i>Deyeuxia billardieri</i>		-	+	-	+
<i>Parapholis incurva</i> *		-	-	-	+
<i>Phormium tenax</i>	N.Z. flax	+	+	+	+
<i>Poa anceps</i>		-	-	+	-
<i>P. annua</i> *		-	-	-	+
<i>Scirpus nodosus</i>		+	+	-	-
<i>Sporobolus africanus</i> *	ratstail	+	-	-	-
<i>Vulpia bromoides</i> *		+	+	+	+
DICOTS					
<i>Anagallis arvensis</i> *	scarlet pimpernel	+	+	-	+
<i>Coprosma macrocarpa</i>	coastal karamu	-	-	+	-
<i>C. repens</i>	taupata	+	+	+	+
<i>Cyathodes fasciculata</i>	mingimingi	+	-	+	-
<i>Disphyma australe</i>	N.Z. iceplant	+	+	+	+
<i>Erigeron floribundus</i> *		-	-	-	+
<i>Gnaphalium luteo-album</i>		+	-	-	+
<i>G. spicatum</i> *		+	-	-	-
<i>Hypochoeris radicata</i> *	catsear	-	+	-	-
<i>Lotus angustissimus</i> *		+	-	-	-
<i>L. subbiflorus</i> *		-	+	-	-
<i>Metrosideros excelsa</i>	pohutukawa	+	+	+	+
<i>Oxalis perennans</i>		+	-	-	-
<i>Peperomia urvilleana</i>		+	-	-	-
<i>Pimelea prostrata</i>	Strathmore weed	+	-	-	-
<i>Pitiosporum crassifolium</i>	karo	-	-	+	-
<i>Polycarpon tetraphyllum</i> *	allseed	+	-	-	+
<i>Sagina apetala</i> *		-	-	-	+
<i>Samolus repens</i>		+	+	-	-
<i>Senecio hispidulus</i>		+	-	-	-
<i>S. lautus</i>	shore groundsel	+	+	+	+
<i>Sonchus oleraceus</i> *	sowthistle	+	+	+	+
<i>Tillaea sieberiana</i>		+	-	-	+

* denotes adventive species